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JOAN K. DOWNING
Pocatello, Idaho

Filling the Space Between Enemies

TO THE EDITOR: We read with pleasure the open letter from John Lindner to President Carter appearing in your issue of Nov. 13, 1978. We were particularly glad to see the issue of the Soviet Union's role raised so clearly, and glad also to see the emphasis on process rather than on the details of proposed solutions.

As a sort of gloss on this last point, we would like to report an incident that reflects something of the same spirit. That spirit is expressed also in a quotation from Albert Camus that has great relevance to the Middle East situation though it was not originally so intended:

Yes, the essential thing is to leave room, however limited it may be, for the exchange of views that is still possible; the essential thing is to bring about an easing of the situation, however slight and temporary it may be. And to achieve that, each of us must preach pacification to his people.

But saying this today, as I know by experience, amounts to taking one's stand in the no man's land between two armies and preaching amid the bullets that war is a deception, and that bloodshed, if it sometimes makes history progress, makes it progress toward even greater barbarism and misery.

On Nov. 5, 1978, Prime Minister Begin was in Los Angeles to attend an Israel Bonds dinner. Outside the hotel were demonstrations by the Jewish Defense League and by a group supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization. A good many curses were noisily exchanged between the two.

In between stood in silent vigil, Jew and Arab together, individuals including ourselves associated with the peace groups Bridge the Gap and Los Angeles Fellowship of Reconciliation. They carried a banner saying: "Israeli-Palestinian Reconciliation: The Key to Peace."

The police, obviously fearing violence between the Palestinian and JDL groups, had asked if we "would mind" holding our vigil *between* the other two. They said our groups had very "peace-loving reputations" and that they thought we might have a calming effect on the other groups. Looking over at the JDL, who had come armed with umbrellas as symbols of the appeasement of which they felt Begin was guilty, and seeing the umbrella points which were at times brandished rather menacingly, we asked, "and what if we fail to have a calming effect?" And the police smiled and said, "Well, then you'd probably get it from both sides."

With only a little hesitation we placed ourselves between the two antagonistic groups—they shouted and marched while we stood silently. And when it was all over, there had been no fights, no confrontation, and our surprised group was thanked profusely by the

police, a rare thing in our kind of work. They said they thought we had helped prevent what could have been a messy confrontation between the pro-PLO folks and the JDL, and that if there were more people like us there would be less need for people like them (the police). And we explained that it was our goal, as well, to create a world where the job of police would no longer be perceived as necessary.

And perhaps one way of doing that is by placing ourselves quietly between parties in conflict and declaring that both have rights and that hatred and fear cure nothing.

JOE MAIZLISH
DANIEL HIRSCH

Both signers are members of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, 10921 Wilshire, Suite 6, Los Angeles, CA 90024.

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